Israel's army chief promises to stop attacks by settlers

JERUSALEM: Israel's military chief pledged on Wednesday to halt settler violence in the occupied West Bank, following a wave of attacks targeting Palestinians in the territory.

On Tuesday, Israeli forces had arrested several settlers after clashes near Tulkarem, during which Palestinians were injured and property destroyed.

The military said it dispatched troops after "masked Israeli civilians attacked Palestinians and set fire to property in the area", adding that four injured Palestinians were evacuated for medical treatment.

"We are aware of the recent violent incidents in which Israeli civilians attacked Palestinians and Israelis. I strongly condemn them," army chief Lt Gen Eyal Zamir said in a statement issued by the military.

Zamir said the military "will not tolerate criminal behaviour by a small minority that tarnishes the law-abiding public. "These acts contradict our values, cross a red line, and divert the attention of our troops from their mission," he warned.

"We are determined to stop this phenomenon and will act decisively until justice is served."

Israel has occupied the West Bank since 1967, and more than 500,000 Israelis live in settlements in the Palestinian territory.

Some of these Israelis engage in violence against Palestinians, who complain that Israeli forces usually do not arrest settlers.

All settlements in the occupied West Bank are illegal under international law.

The UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said that October was the worst month for settler violence since it began recording in 2006, with 264 attacks that caused casualties or property damage.

Almost none of the perpetrators have been held to account by the Israeli authorities.

Israel's army chief said that troops were operating "to prevent threats and harm to residents of the area".

"We operate according to a clear principle: terrorism only meets the army... we are the defensive barrier between the terrorist organisations and Israel's civilians," Gen Zamir said.

Violence has surged across the occupied territory since the conflict in Gaza broke out in Oct 2023. At least 1,003 Palestinians have been killed in region by Israeli forces or settlers since then.—AFP

RED Cross personnel, escorted by Hamas fighters, head towards an area within the "yellow line" in Gaza to which Israeli troops withdrew under the ceasefire agreement.—Reuters

Starmer hits back amid conspiracy rumours

LONDON: UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer insisted on Wednesday he runs a "united team" after a senior minister was forced to repeatedly deny that he planned to oust the embattled premier.

Starmer's comments came after Downing Street sources said Britain's leader would fight off any leadership challenge, as a briefing war exposed tensions at the heart of the beleaguered government.

Rumours are swirling in the UK parliament that some ministers are plotting to challenge Starmer following a budget due later this month, in which Labour is expected to break manifesto promises.

"This is a united team," he told parliament, adding that he was focused on "rebuilding the country".

Earlier, health minister Wes Streeting told *Sky News* that he was "not going" to demand Starmer's resignation, adding: "I support the prime minister.

"I have been doing so since he was elected leader of the Labour Party." The 42-year-old is considered one of Labour's better performers and has long been touted as a potential replacement for Starmer, among others, including interior minister Shabana Mahmood.

Streeting's denial, repeated to other broadcasters, followed anonymous briefings by Starmer allies who told journalists he would fight any bid to replace him, in what appeared to be an attempt to warn them off.

Starmer told parliament that attacks on any of his cabinet members were "completely unacceptable" and said Streeting was doing a "great job".

"The government has descended into civil war," said opposition Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch.

Difficult budget looms

Starmer led Labour to a landslide victory over the Conservatives in July last year, returning the centre-left party to power for the first time in 14 years.

But his government's poll ratings and his personal standing among the British public have nosedived due to struggles on key issues such as economic growth and irregular immigration.

Brexit figurehead Nigel Farage's hard-right Reform UK party has been leading by double-digit margins in many national polls for much of this year.

The next general election is not expected until 2029, but the government faces an important test at local elections in May 2026.

First, Starmer must navigate a difficult budget on November 26, when finance minister Rachel Reeves is expected to raise taxes for workers despite a pre-election pledge not to do so.

A challenge for the Labour Party leadership would require the support of 20 percent of its MPs, which would currently require 80 nominations.

Some Labour MPs fear a contest would plunge the party into similar chaos experienced by the Conservatives, who cycled through five leaders between 2016 and 2022 as it fought amongst itself.

A backbench Labour MP said that the party should focus on governing and trying to claw back support from Reform.

"We have a commanding majority, a clear timeline until the next election and a compelling narrative of fixing the country after 14 years of damage and decay, including through Farage and the Tories' Brexit mess," they said.—AFP

Astronomers spot storm on another star for first time

PARIS: Astronomers revealed on Wednesday they have detected a storm on a star other than our Sun for the first time, discovering an explosion so violent it could have stripped away the atmosphere of any planet unlucky enough to be nearby.

Solar storms on the Sun sometimes shoot out huge eruptions known as coronal mass ejections, which can disrupt satellites when they arrive at Earth and create colourful auroras that dance across the sky.

In fact, a particularly powerful solar storm caused auroras as far south as the US city of Tennessee on Wednesday, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Auroras were also visible in the skies above New Zealand, with more expected later this week.

However, observing such a storm on a distant star had proven difficult for astronomers.

New research, published in the journal *Nature*, revealed that an international team of researchers has finally achieved the feat.

The discovery used data from a European network of telescopes called LOFAR.

The team of astronomers has been using LOFAR since 2016 to detect the most extreme and violent events in the universe, such as black holes, which emit relatively stable radio signals over time.

In 2022, the team decided to find out "what had been caught in this net", Tasse said.

They found that there was a huge explosion on May 16, 2016, which only lasted a minute. It came from a red dwarf star called StKM 1-1262 more than 133 light years away.—AFP

Holidaymakers told to shout, not get in a flap over seagulls

LONDON: Aggressive seagulls have long terrorised British holidaymakers trying to enjoy fish and chips or an ice cream on a day at the seaside.

Now, animal behaviourists say they have discovered the best way to tackle the feathery bandits: shout at them.

Experts at the University of Exeter in southwestern England placed a portion of fish and chips in front of gulls and then played one of several different recordings.

One recording featured a male voice yelling, "No, stay away, that's my food, that's my pasty!" The second used the same voice speaking the words calmly, while the third was a recording of a robin's birdsong.

The researchers tried the recordings on the squawking menaces across nine seaside towns in tourism hotspot Cornwall, according to a paper published Wednesday in the journal *Biology Letters*.

The birds were three times more likely to take flight when exposed to the shouting voice compared to the speaking voice, while the birdsong was the least effective deterrent, it found.

Out of 21 birds given the shouting treatment, 10 flew away, and three walked away. Eight stood their ground.

Of 20 birds that heard the speaking voice, three flew away, 10 walked away, and seven stayed put.—AFP

Trump seeks presidential pardon for Netanyahu

TEL AVIV: Israeli President Isaac Herzog has received a letter from US President Donald Trump urging him to consider granting a pardon to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Herzog's office said on Wednesday.

Netanyahu has been facing a long-running corruption trial, and Trump has repeatedly asked for a pardon for his close ally. Netanyahu denies the charges and has pleaded not guilty.

"While I absolutely respect the independence of the Israeli justice system, and its requirements, I believe that this case against Bibi (Netanyahu), who has fought alongside me for a long time, including against the very tough adversary of Israel, Iran, is a political, unjustified prosecution," Trump said in the letter.

The office said that anyone seeking a presidential pardon must submit a formal request in accordance with the established procedures.

During Trump's visit to Israel last month, he had also urged Herzog to pardon the prime minister in an address to parliament. Netanyahu was indicted in 2019 in three cases, including allegations of receiving nearly 700,000 shekels (almost $212,000) in gifts from businessmen.

Despite the largely ceremonial role of the Israeli presidency, Herzog has the authority to pardon convicted criminals under unusual circumstances.—Reuters

Crisis averted as SL team stay put

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tri-nation series would serve as an important preparation platform ahead of the ICC T20 World Cup 2026, the PCB said. Updated fixtures for both the ODI series and the T20 tournament "will be shared shortly" on the board's official platforms, it said. Tickets purchased for the earlier dates will remain valid for the rescheduled fixtures.

Earlier, sources said some Sri Lankan players raised safety concerns and asked to return following Tuesday's suicide blast in Islamabad's G-11 sector.

Speaking to *Dawn*, Sri Lankan Team Manager Mahinda Halangode dismissed reports that some players were returning home. "None are returning," he said when asked about speculation that a few members of the squad had requested to leave the tour.

The visiting players were directed by SLC to continue, as Pakistan has made foolproof security arrangements.

Earlier on Wednesday, Interior Minister and PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi met Sri Lankan High Commissioner Rear Admiral (retd) Fred Siriweera and stressed that the visitors are state guests and that comprehensive security measures are in place.

PCB COO Sameer Ahmed, Islamabad's chief commissioner and police inspector general and team managers from both sides attended the briefing on arrangements. The high commissioner expressed condolences over the attack and expressed satisfaction with the security plan, the PCB said in a statement. Meanwhile, the SLC said in a statement that several members of the national team had requested to return home, citing safety concerns.

"Following this development, SLC immediately engaged with the players and assured them that all such concerns are being duly addressed in close coordination with the Pakistan Cricket Board and the relevant authorities to ensure the safety and well-being of every member of the touring party," it said.

"In this context, SLC has instructed all players, support staff and team management to continue with the tour as scheduled," it added.

However, should any player or member of the touring party decide to return to Sri Lanka despite the directive issued by SLC to continue with the tour, Sri Lanka Cricket would immediately send replacements to ensure that the tour continues without interruption.

"If any player, players or member of the support staff return despite SLC's directives, a formal review will be conducted to assess their actions, and an appropriate decision will be made upon the conclusion of the review," SLC said.

PM blames Kabul-Delhi nexus for surge in terrorist attacks

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great satisfaction and force to these terrorist elements and enemies of Pakistan that we are fully aware of your actions and we have given you a befitting response before and will do so again as well," he said.

The prime minister also detailed Pakistan's diplomatic efforts with Afghanistan's Taliban government, particularly regarding negotiations held in Turkiye.

He said Pakistan has had only one demand for the past two years that the Afghan Taliban rein in terrorist outfits operating from their soil and waging attacks in Pakistan.

While renewing an offer for dialogue, PM Shehbaz urged the Afghan Taliban regime to stop making "false promises" and to decisively tackle the militant groups. He pointedly referenced the timing of a recent cross-border attack with the diplomatic activities of the Taliban government.

"When Pakistan was recently attacked from Afghan side, Afghan's Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi was in Delhi," he said. "We gave shelter to Afghan refugees for 40 years and did not treat them as strangers. But today after 40 years of our hospitality, they [Afghan] gave us this reward."

In a wide-ranging address, the premier also touched on other matters, including military's performance in the May conflict against India and subsequent diplomatic outreach, which he said had rendered India and Prime Minister Narendra Modi "helpless".

He credited this performance for raising the country's reputation and prestige in the international community, linking it to the national support for giving the rank of field marshal to the army chief.

Later, talking to reporters in a corridor of the parliament house, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif confirmed the identity of the bomber in Tuesday's attack. "We have recognised the suicide bomber. He was Afghani," he said, adding that the incident claimed 12 lives and left several others in critical condition.

Terrorism has no religion, race: Dar

At a separate event in Islamabad, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar echoed the government's strong stance against terrorism, stating that it "recognises no religion, race, or boundary".

Speaking at the Inter-Parliamentary Speakers' Conference (ISC), Mr Dar condemned the recent attacks in Wana and Islamabad, which he said claimed 15 lives, and expressed heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families. He emphasised that such acts cannot weaken the country's resolve and instead "reinforce the nation's commitment to dialogue, understanding, and partnership as the only sustainable paths to peace and security".

Mr Dar said Pakistan's foreign policy is firmly guided by the principles of the UN Charter, including sovereign equality, peaceful settlement of disputes, non-interference, and friendly relations among nations.

Highlighting the global context, Mr Dar noted that the world is experiencing profound transformations, with geopolitical rivalries, economic disparities, climate crises and growing inequalities challenging global peace.

"Diplomacy, whether in the chamber or the chancery, must always serve the people," Mr Dar said. "People-centred diplomacy ensures that the dividends of peace reach citizens, that development is inclusive, and that international cooperation translates into tangible human progress."

The foreign minister emphasised that parliamentary diplomacy complements traditional diplomatic efforts by bringing the perspectives of elected representatives into international discourse. "Parliamentarians, who are closest to the people, play a critical role in fostering dialogue, sharing experiences, and promoting governance, human rights, and democracy," he said.

The foreign minister concluded by praising the leadership of Senate chairman and ISC founding chairman, Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani.

He noted that under Gilani's guidance, the Senate consistently advocates for multilateralism and parliamentary diplomacy, serving as a platform to advance global peace, security, and prosperity.

Syed Irfan Raza also contributed to this report

NA stamps approval on 27th Amendment

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on the floor of the house. The situation began to deteriorate when Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and PML-N President Nawaz Sharif arrived in the hall. At this, the PTI lawmakers started chanting slogans targeting the PML-N leaders and against the constitutional amendment.

Ruckus in the house

During the protest, PML-N MNAs made a shield in front of the PM and Nawaz Sharif to prevent the PTI members from approaching the premier and the party chief. Similarly, the security guards of the Parliament House also came closer to the PM for his security. The protest also disrupted the law minister's and the PPP chief's speeches, and the opposition members tore up the copies of the bill and flung them towards the PM's chair.

Interestingly, PTI firebrand leader Sher Afzal Marwat did not join the protest and remained seated even after the opposition MNAs walked out of the house in protest. Later, he went directly to PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari to meet him and listened to the PM's speech. As the premier spoke in the house, PTI MNA Iqbal Khan Afridi again entered the house with a banner in his hands, which carried the portrait of PTI founder Imran Khan. He went to the speaker's dais and kept displaying the banner to the PM throughout his speech.

When Law Minister Azam Nazir Tarar started reading clauses of the bill, the opposition members gathered in front of the speaker's dais to continue with their noisy protest. The bill, however, was passed by the National Assembly with the required majority. After its passage from the NA, it will be sent to the Senate for its approval due to some amendments that were introduced during the NA session.

Bilawal defends Article 243 changes

Speaking on the floor of the house, the PPP chairman vowed that they would never support the rollback of the 18th Amendment and of any laws that would go against the basic rights of the people.

Mr Bhutto-Zardari chairman said his party decided to support the changes in Article 243 in the "context that Pakistan is going through a situation of war". "On the one hand, we defeated India. On the other hand, India hosted the Afghan foreign minister, and what is happening on our second border after that, the blood spilling of our citizens is in front of you," he said. The PPP leader said terrorism was once again on the rise, but Pakistan had managed to defeat the menace before and would do so again.

"In the 27th Amendment, we are about to fulfill the unfulfilled promises of the Charter of Democracy. We are about to establish constitutional courts, and in Article 243 — after defeating India, the prime minister decided to make the army chief the field marshal — not only are we providing constitutional protection to that rank of field marshal, but also bringing some changes to the defence institutions," he said.

Opp assails 27th Amendment

PTI interim chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan, however, assailed the amendment. He said by rushing the amendments, "you have sunk the ship of democracy and judicial independence". "They introduced another amendment that we're only seeing for the first time," he lamented.

Furthermore, Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PkMAP) chief Mehmood Khan Achakzai termed the amendment "undemocratic and of the wrong kind". He noted that even those were included in advancing those who had "given huge sacrifices", recalling that ex-premiers Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto had to spend years abroad in exile for "wanting rule of the people".

"You stole the mandate, respected speaker. I am sorry [but] you have stolen the mandate," the opposition leader thundered. He went on to cite two more such alleged cases, but his full comments were unclear as the video uploaded by the NA was censored. The PkMAP leader said, "Whether Imran Khan is a good person or a bad person … why did you let him become the prime minister? Why did you keep all institutions of the country in front of him? And then obstructed his path from the courts to the streets."

Tarar calls out PTI

Meanwhile, Information Minister Attaullah Tarar alleged that the PTI had been accepting of "fascism" in the past, saying that in contrast, they had a problem today when parliament was on its way to pass a constitutional amendment through a legal strategy, political process and consultation.

"This selective morality, selective justice, double standards — what exactly is their politics other than this?" he said, asking why the PTI did not chant such slogans when former NA deputy speaker Qasim Khan Suri made the unconstitutional move of dismissing the no-confidence motion against Imran in 2022.

"Their selective memory and thinking do not go back any further than 2020," he said, referring to the PTI. "They should apologise for what they did in 2017 and the way they came into power through the back door." The minister regretted that "most of Mehmood Khan Achakzai's speech today was all about Kabul".

PTI statement

In a separate statement after the session, the PTI termed the 27th amendment the death of the Constitution. Pakistan's consensus Constitution of 1973 — the supreme guarantor of public sovereignty, judicial independence, and fundamental rights — has officially "passed away", the former ruling party claimed. "Governments reflecting the will of the people are no longer allowed to function, the courts no longer dare to deliver justice, and the media is no longer permitted to speak the truth," it stated. However, the PTI pledged that the party would leave no stone unturned in its struggle to revive the Constitution and restore it to its pre-26th Amendment form, it concluded.

Ikram Junaidi also contributed to this report